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ABSTRACT

This speech explores the gap between curriculum theory and curriculum practice. It begins with a discussion of Joseph Schwab's pursuit of "the practical" in curriculum theory and then searches for a basis for "the practical." Schwab's theory involves two parts: "deliberation" as the process of dealing with a problem before taking action and "the eclectic" linking of theory to practice by consideration of the "whole" of what may be involved in any particular curriculum problem. Schwab's theory is seen as a means for resolving epistemological problems. Schwab is likened to a film maker who pursues an unrealistic goal but creates a fascinating film. In the second portion of the speech a teacher's daily curriculum activities are the starting point in the search for Schwab's "the practical." Curriculum theory has a difficult entry at this practical level, while deliberation appears to be an academic procedure. This is because everyday curriculum decisions are typically unreflective and based largely on routine and taken-for-granted expectancies, such as the teacher's, not the students', opening class each day. Scientific method takes the back seat to unreflective thinking. The gap between theory and the practical is isolated as the rift between the language of theory where deliberation reaches logical ends and the language of the practice where decisions result from myriad and often nonlogical causes. (JH)

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IN SEARCH OF THE PRACTICAL

- PERSPECTIVES -
[draft]

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IN SEARCH OF THE PRACTICAL

- PERSPECTIVES -

> Some are of the opinion that there is no
> gate that is their opinion
> there is no way of knowing except to go
> through it.
>
> R. D. Laing (Knots)

The Practical as Language FOR Curriculum

"If anybody here knows the practical skills which are deemed necessary in curriculum problem solving then would he or she please stand up" . . . Nobody moved. During a recent retreat in which the members of a graduate department of Curriculum made a concerted effort of coming to grips with some comprehensive issues of curriculum studies, these were the words whereby one professor challenged his fellow curriculum specialists.

The concern with the practical is a real and timely one. In an increasingly decentralized curriculum development milieu teachers, curriculum consultants and coordinators frequently are turning to the centres for studies in education to provide them with validated information necessary to engage in practical curriculum development and classroom change. However, even though theory, models, strategies and recommendations for curriculum processes continue to proliferate, the validity of these theoretical models either has not been demonstrated empirically, or the models are cast in such esoteric or generalized language that it is in fact uncertain how they effectively and unambiguously could be applied or translated into curriculum practice. In a recent report (Creemers) of visitations to some major curriculum research and development centres in North America and Europe, the Dutch authors conclude that the objects of theoretical concern in the literature are simply not conceptualized as practical problems by many project teams who develop curriculum. For

example, issues of formulation, derivation and legitimation of objectives are not regarded as issues because many projects take their starting points in a subject-matter content or discipline oriented approach. In general, it is not at all clear what principles are being used to translate knowledge into project materials or how content is being derived from intended learning outcomes. Furthermore, classroom implementation of professionally developed curricula is often dealt with as a deferred concern, or simply as someone else's problem.

Whether by "default" or by "design" curriculum theory, curriculum models and their manifold networks of connecting theoretical, philosophical and ethical principles, fail to technically instruct the practice of curriculum development, planning, and implementation. Schwab has described this state of affairs in curriculum as a crisis of principle. An abundance of competing theoretical positions with respect to any particular curriculum issue, either tends to place the practical educator in a position of doctrinaire loyalty to some limiting theoretical principle, or in the confrontation of a concrete and multifaceted curriculum problem with the wide array of potential theoretical choice points, it leads the educator to a confused state of indecision which amounts to practical impotence.

Schwab has developed his concept of the practical over and against a critique of the significance of principles of theoretical inquiry for curriculum practice. All theory is necessarily incomplete, only examining a limited slice of educational reality from the limiting perspective of some epistemological principle. For the clarification of any particular issue there frequently are many theories (or partial theories) and many theoretical positions which might provide for alternative or complementary interpretations, understandings and solutions of a given problem.

In order to guard against ill-guided practice and the doctrinaire application of any single incomplete theory or set of theories Schwab proposes the introduction of a special discipline -- a practical language for curriculum. The practical, says Schwab, is the discipline concerned with choice and action. Its method leads to defensible decision. Key concepts of the practical are deliberation and the eclectic. The former is the process of dealing with problem choice which precedes action, and the latter describes procedures for dealing with theory in a practical context. The eclectic aims at clarifying the limiting perspective provided by theory, and the sorts of interpretations which theory permits of subject matter. In other words, the eclectic suggests a way for linking theory and practice by means of "a systematic comparison of the principle, premises, methods and selections" of theories in the treatment of "the whole subject matter of the whole plurality of enquiries" with respect to concrete and particular curriculum concerns.

It would seem that the concept of the practical is highly relevant for contemporary curriculum workers. The problem is, however, that with respect to a number of crucial issues Schwab's formulation of such language remains ambiguous and subject to conflicting interpretations. What is the nature of "the grammar" of the practical?

Does it appeal to other faculties than reason? Concretely what, for example, would a curriculum consultant do who employs this language to solve a specific problem? Is the practical language for curriculum also the practical language of curriculum? If not, how are the two languages related? And, in the face of conflicting curriculum demands, duties, obligations, preferences, etc., how does one determine the validity of a practical argument, and what is supposed to be the "best solution?" How to determine what is "best" if, according to Schwab, the eclectic and the

deliberative possesses no rules, no methodological criteria for selection?

With such concerns in mind a class of curriculum students, mostly practicing teachers, were put "in search of the practical". Here follows some of their initial reactions to Schwab's first practical paper.

student a). It is a politically concervative statement about education -- directed against faddism and bandwagon-theorizing in curriculum.

student b). The practical is a form of problem solving not unlike that of normal thinking.

student c). The practical implies a job classification for the curriculum specialist.

student d). The practical is a discipline which seems to lack a workable methodology.

student e). Schwab sets up a strawman, juxtaposing an unreasonable description of practical deliberation.

student f). The practical is what you do when you do curriculum.

student g). The practical is really a theory, and too theoretical to be practical.

I believe that none of these student statements are necessarily incorrect with respect to the intended or unintended meanings embedded in the practical papers. Many students were critical of the clarity of Schwab's statement for the purpose of the practically oriented teacher-educator. They charged that he is suggesting more than what he is actually saying. The same point has been made by Westbury who remarked that Schwab is saying both "too much and too little." It would seem that Schwab's preoccupation with the practical is largely prompted by his long-standing concern with the epistemological constraints of theoretical starting-points and alternative enquiry principles.

Indeed, the term "enquiry principle" has become his vantage point for looking at the scientists look at things. His description of the electic mode and the deliberative processes aim to provide a means for exposing and resolving this epistemological straightjack while readying the educator for curriculum choice and action.

In a way Schwab is somewhat like this man John Marshal that Garfinkel once talked about in a sociology seminar. John Marshal did documentary films at Harvard. His problem was that he set out to make pictures of, for example, a room, by removing the perspectival character of the camera from the document. He wanted to make pictures in such a manner that the location from which he has been taking shots across the room could be eliminated from the result he was producing. Perhaps he felt that he had to do this because he did not like the limiting view afforded by the fact that the camera had to be put up in some location in the room and that he had to make a choice of lenses to achieve focus and field of vision. It was clear to his colleagues that he had an impossible problem. How does one remove the perspectival view of the camera from the document? The film maker would come up with what his colleagues thought were "insane" script proposals for eliminating the perspectival effect of the camera. Moreover, he would never stop talking about his projects and constantly bug them with ideas for new approaches. They winked behind his back, and said to each other, "get that." How foolish to persist in solving a practical problem that is doomed to failure by its very terms. But whenever John Marshal would show his colleagues a screening of his latest film they had to face the fact that his movies were marvelous and fascinating in the way the film maker had gone about attempting to do the impossible.

Now, this example carries over to the problem of the practical in curriculum talk. Schwab is like the film maker, at times, when he complains about things like theories are "incomplete" and "frightingly onesided". Or when he claims that the "eclectic" approach will deal with "the whole subject-matter of the whole plurality of inquiries", as if talking about it in this way could be free from bias of principle or perspectivism. Schwab's talk resembles that of the film maker when, for example, he talks about the procedures of "the eclectic" by means of what he terms a "semi-systematic method" of "irrelevant scanning" which means looking at the object "through a succession of lenses", and by what Schwab calls "immediate perception", that is, a sort of "non-categorial viewing" by figuratively, as Schwab says, "throwing one's eyes and mind out of focus."

What Garfinkel points out is, that although the film maker had a poor way of talking, his collegues missed how the talk of the man was "tied into the thing he was doing as a feature of what he was doing." Contrary to the film maker Schwab is not a poor talker. His language has an admirable plasticity. But it would be a mistake to fail to understand that his talking in this way is itself a practical curriculum activity, and that it can be understood as such.

As the title suggests the aim of this paper is to pose central the search for the practical -- in whatever way it can be found, if indeed it can be found. A natural location of the practical would appear to lie in the natural attitude of doing curriculum, i.e., in the sphere of daily planning, developing, implementing, teaching, and evaluating curriculum. This is the attitude of everyday life -- work, social interaction, play, etc. The practical in this sense is a concern of ~~everyday life~~ ordinary work, it expresses itself in our daily activities, in what Schutz calls the routines or taken-for-granted grounds of everyday life.

The Practical as Language OF Curriculum

The language of the practical then is the curriculum language inside and outside the classroom, i.e., the practical reasoning and acting in which teachers, students and other educators engage during the developing/planning and the teaching/learning phases of the curriculum. Typically this language is fleeting and full of experiential and concrete detail which can be partically recorded by paper and pencil, coding instruments, tape recorder, or videotape. However, none of these recording techniques probably can fully catch the rich and subtle detail of meanings of all that transpires during the transactions and interactions, within and among the teachers, learners and the curriculum materials.

It is instructive to note that a teacher, while it is his daily business to work with curriculum knowledge, problem solving skills, children, etc., he does so largely in a manner of course and in an act of practicality which is characteristic of everyday life. How the teacher starts his class or how he teaches Johnny to sit still or how to do long division is part of the knowledge which he has, so to speak, at hand. Schutz who has made special study of the character of the ordinary life world, says about practical knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of the man who acts and thinks within the world of his daily life, "that it is incoherent, only partially clear, and not at all free from contradictions" (Schutz p. 75). Although the teacher or the curriculum worker almost certainly has available relatively isolated bodies of fairly consistent knowledge, for the most parts "clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures; suppositions and prejudices cross well-proven evidences; motives, means and ends, as well as causes and effects are strung together without clear understanding of their real connections." However, the fact that our knowledge is not so

well organized, clear, and based upon hard evidence rather makes practical action possible. Our knowledge in daily life is governed by rules, habits, inclinations and principles on which we have learned to rely and the origin of which is almost beyond our control. Our knowledge in our daily work and living, Schutz points out, it not without hypotheses, inductions and predictions, but they all have the character of the approximate, of likelyhood, and of reasonable expectations based on the experience that it-worked-in-the-past and therefore we expect it will work again in this concrete situation. The consistency of this form of practical knowledge is not that of natural laws, but that of typical sequences. (Schutz[2] p. 23).

If Schutz is right and if practical reasoning and practical acting in curriculum is not essentially different from ordinary life work, then this kind of practical knowledge is very much like "cook-book knowledge."

> "The cook-book has recipes, lists of ingredients, formulae for mixing them, and directions for finishing off. This is all we need to make an apple pie, and also all we need to deal with the routine matters of daily life. If we enjoy the apple pie so prepared, we do not ask whether the manner of preparing it as indicated by the recipe is the most appropriate from the hygienic or alimentary point of view, or whether it is the shortest, the most economical, or the most efficient. We just eat and enjoy it. Most our daily activities from rising to going to bed are of this kind." (Schutz[2] pp. 73-74)

Suppose the knowledge which teachers, curriculum consultants, coordinators, and other specialists have about the everyday affairs of curriculum, is in large measure not unlike the cook-book knowledge in the way it has been described by Schutz. What then is the nature of the practical reasoning and acting that are based on this knowledge? Teachers are said to be continuously confronted with situations wherein they must make practical curriculum decisions. Deliberating, valuing, choosing, rational acting, all these have been described as common places of the curriculum. However,

Schutz, and the contemporary sociologists (e.g. Berger, Luckman) and ethnomethodologists* (e.g., Garfinkel, Cicourel, Sacks), who have continued the investigations of everyday methodical problems, have argued that most everyday deliberations, in so far as they are indeed conscious, are usually "reasonable" but seldom "rational" in a strict sense of the term. At the point where a teacher is confronted with the talk of mastering a situation or making curriculum decisions, he tends to appeal to his emotions, his interests, his knowledge, and to his stock of recipes, ready-made rules, skills and know-hows arising out of his practical experiences.

The curriculum language of the practical is situated in the verbal and nonverbal practical actions of teacher. That is, the practical can be studied in the kinds of things teachers do and don't do -- in the ways they talk to real students in concrete teaching-learning instances, in the ways they organize and select materials and prepare themselves for instruction, and in the ways they cope with the burden of pressures from parents, administrators, students, fellow teachers, etc.

To paraphrase Schutz, the attitude of everyday practical curriculum activities typically is mostly unreflective, largely based upon routine practices and taken-for-granted expectancies which form the stabilizing features of the curriculum as a practical and an ongoing affair. To get a grasp on the practical would involve an effort to make the reflexive and taken-for-granted character of the routine and problematic of practical curriculum activities visible for inspection. This is important, since it would reveal, for example, under what conditions, in what form, and to what extent curriculum deliberation can be expected to take place, and how deliberate curriculum

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*Ethnomethodology is concerned with the practical and has been described as the systematic study (logos) of the methodical practices (method) that the members of a variety of organizational settings (ethnos) make use of in the practical reasoning of their contained activities.

intervention might be seen to occur.

Making visible the stable features of preactive, interactive, and post-active teaching would enable us to identify the often unexamined, expected, ways in which curriculum is being done. These are the seen-but-unnoticed (Garfinkel) or the taken-for-granted (Schutz) attributes of curriculum processes. The question then becomes, how can one problematize concrete curriculum talk (practical reasoning) and curriculum activities (practical actions), in order to reveal their hidden or taken-for-granted character?

Some commonplaces of the practical become visible by simple techniques such as "making anthropologically strange a familiar scene." Schutz has illustrated this approach in his phenomenological studies of "The Stranger" and "The Homecomer." And Garfinkel revealed surprising aspects of familiar and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life by applying techniques of "estrangement" or "disturbance" to socially standardized and expected features of life. At first, it is hard to think, perhaps, how this can be done and why it should be done. But it may appear that even seemingly trivial commonplaces, such as the fact that it is commonly the teacher who "starts" or "begins" the class, become interesting upon examination.

It is clear that in the traditional classroom a great number of expectancies are being erected which affect other aspects of the curriculum. Substitute teachers know this when they hear students say, "we don't do it in that way", "we always get such-and-such."

A fairly stable and seemingly trivial feature of the teaching task rules that teachers, not their students "begin" or "start" the class. Teachers "start" the class. What happens if they do not? Some social studies teachers who were involving their students in learning about the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, reported that interesting patterns tended

to develop. The teacher unobtrusively would take his usual place in class and sort of keep busy without saying anything to the class and without necessarily looking at any student or group of students with special interest. Here is a typical account of a grade six class:

> "Ten minutes have passed by and the class is still noisy. The students are paying little attention to me (the teacher). I do catch a few probing glances from some students, however, An occasional student looks in my direction, wondering perhaps if something unusual is the case. Students sit turned around in their seats and keep on talking. Several students shout across the room. Ruptures of excitement occur accompanied by loud laughing. Scott and Jonathon walk out of their desks to pass something on to Eric who lets go with a belligerent yell. Several children laugh. Others echo the noise from other parts of the room. More than twenty minutes have passed since I closed the door and some students seem to be discussing my inactivity; they seem to speculate about my condition or motives and "meaningful" whispering and chuckling is heard. I hear things like, "maybe he's sick," "why don't you ask him?" More students look in my direction, now apparently probing for clues. However, I feign not to notice and stay sort of pre-occupied looking over some materials on my desk. Some students have taken out a book and have begun to work. Others still remain fidgity and continue their interactions with classmates. After about twenty-five minutes the whole class has turned unnaturally quiet. It almost happened at once. A deadening silence has fallen. Everybody seems busy working. The class appears extremely "well-behaved", some tension is evident however. I still haven't said anything and feel quite at a loss now how to break the silence.
>
> (reconstructed discussion:)
>
> teacher: "How did you feel?"
> Frank: "Nothing. . ."
> Carl: "After a while I got afraid something was wrong with you."
> Paul: "Yaeh, thought maybe you didn't feel good."
> Scott: "We didn't have to do problems (arithmetic)."
> teacher: "Why was it suddenly silent?". . .
> teacher: "Everybody seemed to be working."
> Laurie: "Guessed that maybe you were letting us know something. . . I mean testing us."
> Tina: "I felt like working."
> John: "Oh sure. . ."
> Laurie: "Did you want to teach us, perhaps. . . I mean that we should be able to work on our own?"
> teacher: "Is that what you felt?"
> Scott: "Yaeh, I thought you were deciding who should stay late."

During the ensuing discussion with the class the teacher explained to his students that he had done this deliberately in order to let them experience some of the "habits" of living. Among other things he asked them whether they thought it was right that the teacher always starts the class. And what would happen if the students would be required to start? Would it make any difference in terms of when they would learn and what they would not learn? Some students suggested they might be doing very different things, and one remarked that it was like a game, the person who starts determines what game is being played.

Other commonplaces become visible, for example, in the mere act of reflection upon the otherwise apparently fleeting, partly routine and partly deliberative processes of teacher curriculum development. Five teachers, all graduate students, were asked to keep a daily record of the ongoing happenings, ideas, procedures, decisions, activities, etc. during the times of the day that they were involved in developing a curriculum unit of instruction*. Although these students were excellent teachers and had developed units in the past, they found this exercise most frustrating and, in fact, interfering with their ordinary work. The simple task of writing a protocol of the work seemed to make the job more difficult than usual. Curriculum plans, aims and instructional strategies for some of these teachers seem to mature in ways which are hard to catch in writing. For example, ordinarily a teacher might see an article or a cartoon in the newspaper and promptly decide that this cartoon might be worth saving for his Social Studies unit on "Poverty".

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*These protocols are being accumulated in the context of a small-scale study into (pretheoretical) teacher-based curriculum unit development in social studies education, funded by the Research and Development Office of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario.

However, in writing down, later about this event he reflectively would attempt to legitimate his picking the cartoon in terms of some educational means or end. The point is that this teacher did not necessarily have an objective in mind when he reached for the scissors. The cartoon simply struck him as significant or interesting.

The commonplace is that teachers usually proceed as if they do know what is and what is not an appropriate, worthwhile or adequate curriculum decision. However, upon deliberate reflection of their activities (such as by keeping a diary of the curriculum process) they frequently are confronted by the fact that their confidence in the proceed-as-usual is placed in doubt. And this is particularly true if they suspect that the proceed-as-usual may not meet the expectations of some outside observer. It is under the pressures of uncertainties such as doubts created by new expectations that teachers are forced out of the proceed-as-usual and into the deliberative process.

Short-term workshops are known to be notoriously ineffective. It is not uncommon to hear teachers remark that they did not acquire many new insights from a curriculum workshop which intended to demonstrate the application of new theory. However, what teachers often do acquire from workshops is a deep-seated feeling of sudden uncomfortableness with their own practice. Confidence in the proceed-as-usual has given way to the insecure feeling of doubtful practice. In other words, a commonplace has become visible which now stands in need, either for legitimation or for new (changed) practice. Both require deliberation for their solution.

The Practical as Curriculum Deliberation

It is doubt alone which makes curriculum deliberation possible. And doubt arises in situations where the world-taken-for-granted is disrupted by the conflicting or incongruous nature of a new experience, or by a new set of expectations which cannot be met by the stock of practical knowledge at hand. Recent changes toward decentralization in curriculum development responsibilities have altered the traditional role and the concommitant performance expectations of teachers, consultants, etc. It is a commonplace of theory of institutions that social actors tend to identify themselves with the socially constructed descriptions of role performance. Institutional shifts from centralized to decentralized curriculum responsibilities have resulted in redefinitions of roles which describe the typifications of performances of all the parties involved.

In a more centralized setting individual teachers may have involved themselves voluntarily in curriculum development activities, now they must see themselves as teachers, planners and developers. The teacher, as well as those who support, consult and advise him, presently are confronted with a set of institutionalized expectations which demand a form of practical reasoning and practical acting beyond the available stock of recipes, ready-made rules, and knowledge which they have available. It would seem that the argument has now come full circle. In order to instruct the practical language of curriculum one would need to construct a practical language for curriculum. However, unless such language enters into the everyday practical worksphere it would simply remain a practical language belonging to a different ethnos, unacceptable to teachers, consultants and other curriculum workers.

Typically, the methodical features of the "practical talk" of curriculum specialists is characterized by an almost unquestioned concern with the role of theory and epistemology in curriculum. Even when this commonplace self-reflectively is being articulated and refuted, such as in Schwab's Practical Papers (and of course in this paper also), the mode of practical reasoning remains paradoxically theoretical. In and around the classroom, where curriculum is being enacted, the commonplaces are different from those in the academic workplace. And when practical deliberation is needed it typically does not require the rational procedures of scientific deliberations. In other words, "deliberation" is a graded and an equivocal term. It is graded in the sense that it usually involves a fair mix of emotions, impulses habits, desires, etc. and the more rational features of deliberative reasoning. The ingredients of the mix may or may not be reasonably appropriate for the particular curriculum problem at hand. Dewey effectively exposed the rational theory of deliberation as contrary to empirical fact. He defined deliberation as "a dramatic rehearsal in imagination of various competing possible lines of actions . . . It is an experiment in making various combinations of selected elements of habits and impulses to see what the resultant action would be like if it were entered upon." (p. 181)

The term "deliberation" is being used equivocally when it is made to refer to a form of practical reasoning which, in fact, only serves to rationalize for a course of action which the teacher cannot help but taking. This happens when a definite personal bias, strong attitudes or a rigid perspective interferes with the deliberative process. Neither is the idea of deliberation applicable to actions which are the outcomes of a mental process which Taylor has described as a vacillation between competing

impulses, desires or motives. Although such impulsive actions are not necessarily "unreasonable". However, it is implicit that deliberation always involves elements of reason or rationalities (see Garfinkel pp. 262-283). If a mental process reduces to the mere vacillation between competing impulses, desires or motives then it is no longer correct speak of deliberated action.

All deliberation is purposive or intentional, always involving curriculum means or ends. The technique of deliberation, says Schutz, is thinking in the future perfect tense. But the process of deliberation does not necessarily obey the logical structure of an Aristotelian practical syllogism. From the diary-protocols mentioned above it became clear that frequently actions were taken which only in retrospect were examined and legitimated as being adequate or desirable. What happens in situations like this is, that the teachers defined an action taken as a correct means for an as yet undetermined or insufficiently specified end. A statement by Fox confirms the existence of this critical feature of curriculum deliberation:

> "Our experience has suggested that when the curriculum is prepared through deliberation, objectives arise only in one of the final stages of the discussion. Objectives can be considered to be the memorials to the deliberation." (Fox p.)

When a teacher deliberates about the best way to present certain curriculum materials, he probably will rely on the kind of knowledge which he possesses as adequate-for-all-practical-purposes. Seldomly will he perform an extensive weighing of research evidence with respect to some alternative approaches. Perhaps the significance of deliberation is not predominantly situated in making everyday curriculum decisions. Instead, its power lies in its function to deal with (literally) extra-ordinary problems. It is at this point where theoretical knowledge instructs practical reasoning and practical acting.

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